

“High and Lifted Up”

By Elder David Pyles

The vision recorded in the sixth chapter of Isaiah is one of the greatest ever written. The frequency with which it is quoted in the New Testament shows its importance (Mt 13:13-15, Jn 12:37-41, Acts 8:25-27, Rom 11:8). The prophecy entailed symbolism that scholars have variously interpreted. In what follows I will present my understanding of the vision. The prophecy began with:

In the year that king Uzziah died I saw also the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up, and his train filled the temple. Above it stood the seraphims: each one had six wings; with twain he covered his face, and with twain he covered his feet, and with twain he did fly. And one cried unto another, and said, Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord of hosts: the whole earth is full of his glory. – Isa 6:1-3

The New Testament explains this as a vision of Jesus Christ after His resurrection and ascension (Jn 12:37-41). This is what gives significance to the words “*high and lifted up*.” However the seraphims (or “cherubim”) were situated even higher and facing downward to the Lord. The significance of this will be understood upon remembering the form of the Ark of the Covenant. The Ark contained the two stone tablets of the Ten Commandments, under which all men stand as condemned, but on top of the Ark was a table of equal width and length called the “Mercy Seat.” All this depicted the fact that men are spared from the condemnation of the Commandments by the mercy of God. From time to time, the high priest would sprinkle blood atop the Mercy Seat, thus showing that mercy would be bought by bleeding and death. Now on either side of the Mercy Seat were cherubim looking down upon it, even as they were looking down upon the Lord here. The symbolic meaning is that the Mercy Seat is none other than the Lord Jesus Himself, and it was by His blood that mercy to us was secured. This also explains why the cherubim cried, “*Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord of hosts*.” While the cherubim were themselves sinless and holy beings, and like God in this respect, they acknowledged their inferiority to Him because for mercy and forgiveness He has no equal in all of earth or heaven. The Bible also teaches that God has so honored the church of the Jesus Christ that He uses it as a

means to reveal to the angels themselves the mystery of His plan (Eph 3:8-10, 1Tim 3:16 & 5:21, 1Pet 1:12). On this account, the angels of heaven look down with great interest upon the workings of Christ in His church, even as the cherubim looked down on the Ark of the Covenant and the Mercy Seat.

The prophet saw the Lord high and lifted up above the temple, but the train of His royal garment descended and filled the entire house. Now the Bible is clear that the true temple of God is made up of Christ and His people (Eph 2:20-22, 1Pet 2:5-6), with Christ being made the cornerstone as of His first coming, and to be made the headstone as of His second (Zech 4:7). His Apostles make up the foundation, and the remainder of the building is made up of His elect people. The royal train filling the temple is likely a symbol of His Holy Spirit permeating all parts of this spiritual house.

When Isaiah beheld all this, he was emotionally overwhelmed, and troubled because he knew that no human lips, including his own, were worthy to tell of what he had seen. The Jews consider a certain name of God too holy to utter. If this were true, then surely no man would be worthy to say the words “Jesus Christ” because Paul said, *“Wherefore God also hath highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name: That at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth; And that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father,”* (Phil 2:9-11). However, the lips of the prophet were purged (vss 5-7), thus enabling him to tell of what he had seen. All Christians should be thankful that God gives them the privilege of teaching about Jesus Christ, and those who use His name flippantly or in cursing should be solemnly warned. *“But I say unto you, That every idle word that men shall speak, they shall give account thereof in the day of judgment,”* (Mt 12:36)

But after the prophet was authorized to speak, he was given a message that he likely did not anticipate:

And he said, Go, and tell this people, Hear ye indeed, but understand not; and see ye indeed, but perceive not. Make the heart of this people fat, and make their ears heavy, and shut their eyes; lest they see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their heart, and convert, and

*be healed. Then said I, Lord, how long? And he answered,
Until the cities be wasted without inhabitant, and the houses
without man, and the land be utterly desolate, And the Lord
have removed men far away, and there be a great forsaking
in the midst of the land. – Isa 6:9-12*

Hence, what the prophet had been blessed to see in the vision would not be seen by the blinded eyes of his own countrymen, and this blindness would serve to their undoing, even to the extent that they would be driven from the land of Israel. All of this was of course remarkably fulfilled when the Jews, for the most part, rejected Jesus Christ, and were thereafter dispersed all over the world by the Romans. Happily, Isaiah and other prophets elsewhere foretold that one day this sad situation will be reversed when the Jews will be brought to Christ in the last days.